AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application.

LISTING OF CLAIMS

1-18. (Cancelled).

19. (Currently Amended)   A gaming machine comprising:

a bill acceptor for receiving bills tendered, the bill acceptor comprising a sensor for evaluating each inserted bill after it has been inserted in the bill acceptor and outputting a signal which is used by the gaming machine to determine whether to accept or reject that bill;

an annunciator represented by an array of illuminating elements; and

a controller that maintains a first counter and a second counter, the controller incrementing the first counter on each occurrence that the gaming machine accepts a bill that has been inserted into the bill acceptor and incrementing the second counter on each occurrence that the gaming machine rejects a bill that has been inserted into the bill acceptor, the controller further computing a bill acceptance rate using the first and second counters as inputs to the computation and activating the annunciator when the computed bill acceptance rate falls below a predefined value, the controller causing one or more of the array of illuminating elements to be illuminated in a predetermined first pattern and implementing the annunciator through illumination of one or more of the array of illuminating elements in a predetermined second pattern different from said first pattern, wherein said first and second patterns are illuminated according to a plurality of states

associated with said bill acceptor, said controller controlling said plurality of states

associated with said bill acceptor,

wherein an alert regarding a malfunctioning bill acceptor is generated so that a

patron at said gaming machine is not disturbed in game play at the gaming machine, and

wherein the bill acceptor continues to receive and evaluate each inserted bill according to

the same criteria regardless of the value of the computed bill acceptance rate.

20. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the

annunciator is arranged in an area of the bill acceptor that receives bills and is visible

external of the gaming machine.

21. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the

predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when at least 10% of

bills have been rejected.

22. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 21, wherein the

predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when approximately

20% of the bills have been rejected.

23. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 22, wherein the

predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when approximately

30% of the bills have been rejected.

24. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the controller computes an updated bill acceptance rate following each insertion of a bill into the bill acceptor and performs one of activating, deactivating, leaving the annunciator activated, and leaving the annunciator deactivated dependent on a comparison of the updated bill acceptance rate with the predefined value.

25. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 24, wherein the gaming machine further comprises a network interface and wherein the controller is in communication with the network interface and communicates signals relating to the bill acceptance rate to the network interface for communication onto a network.

26. (Cancelled)

27. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a bill acceptor of a gaming machine, the gaming machine including an annunciator represented by an array of illuminating elements, the method comprising:

sensing at least one characteristic of each bill inserted into the bill acceptor;

using at least one sensed characteristic as a basis for a decision as to whether to accept or reject the inserted bill;

maintaining separate counters of the number of bill rejections and bill acceptances;

monitoring a bill acceptance rate of the bill acceptor, the bill acceptance rate being computed depending on the cumulative value of both of the counters and updated following each bill insertion;

automatically activating an annunciator a visual indicator located in a bill receiving zone of the bill acceptor when the bill acceptance rate over the plurality of bill insertions drops below a predetermined threshold, the annunciator implemented through illumination of one or more of the array of illuminating elements in a predetermined second pattern following a predetermined first pattern of illumination wherein the first and second patterns are illuminated according to a plurality of states associated with the bill acceptor;

continuing to sense the at least one characteristic of bills inserted into the bill acceptor; and

continuing to operate the activator for the duration that the bill acceptance rate is below the predetermined threshold so that a patron at the gaming machine is not disturbed in game play at the gaming machine; and

continuing to receive and sense each inserted bill according to the same criteria regardless of the value of the monitored bill acceptance rate.

28. (Cancelled)

29. (Cancelled)